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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ HEALTH & FITNESS

The Happy Body: The Simple Science of Nutrition, Exercise, and Relaxation

Aniela Gregorek
Jerzy Gregorek
Alex Atkins, illustrator
Jurania Press (September 2009)
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For baby boomers who yearn for good health in their golden years, two world champion weightlifters have a recipe for success with their Happy Body program. Aniela and Jerzy Gregorek, both champion athletes and life coaches, share their philosophy and experience in this handsomely designed and, yes, weighty tome.

The couple came to the US in the 1980s as political refugees from Poland. They founded the UCLA weightlifting team and became its head coaches. With MFA degrees in creative writing, they translate poems from Polish to English, and English to Polish.

This hardcover coffee table book is filled with their personal experiences, testimonies of those who have successfully used their methods to achieve a Happy Body; photographic how-to sequences of exercises, such as weightlifting and crunches; nutritional charts; and recipes with colorful photographs of mouth-watering dishes.

The testimonies, mostly written by middle-aged or older clients, shore up motivation for what seems like a daunting program to become more youthful. Charts based on height reveal how much weight must be lost to achieve a Happy Body. Those numbers may well put a stout retiree back to his high school weight and add years to his life.

The body's "happiness" is not just achieved by weight loss; it also depends on the proportion of fat to muscle. Success comes through exercise based on "pressing, pulling, squatting, and bending" for flexibility, developing good posture, and using resistance exercises that "strengthen and build the muscles, making it impossible to burn them for energy." Good posture is a fundamental goal. Numerous photographs clearly show how these exercises can be done at home or at the gym, and readers may be surprised to learn that exercising should not be strenuous and should include relaxation.

The authors' dietary advice is based on eating organic foods and adhering to good nutrition. It's a matter of losing weight without giving up foods you like. The authors, for example, offer healthy substitutes for high-calorie sweets and counsel readers to eat food more frequently during the day.

"Our challenge here was to find a simpler, effortless, non-obsessive way to measure and limit food intake without having to use a precise tool such as a scale," they write. Happy Bodies eat complete, high-protein meals, rather than attempting dietary extremes, such as subsisting on nuts, fruit, and berries.

The Gregoreks' holistic approach to health includes a spiritual component. Relaxation and attitude are key to achieving health goals.

Although some "dialogue" during reported counseling sessions or with potential program candidates seems contrived, the couple's energy and commitment to helping people achieve Happy Bodies is clear. Like many programs, Happy Body requires a commitment to a lifestyle change, but it can lessen the need for certain medications and help readers to feel better about themselves.

The comprehensive book happily charts a challenging, but successful course.

LINDA SALISBURY (March 16, 2010)

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